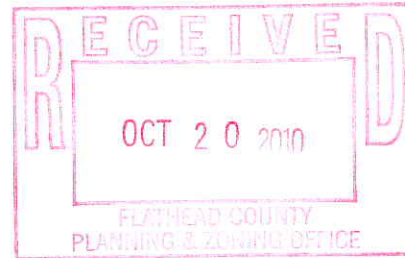




## Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region One  
490 North Meridian Road  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
(406) 752-5501  
FAX: (406) 257-0349  
Ref: JS065-10  
October 20, 2010

B.J. Grieve, Planning Director  
Flathead County Planning & Zoning Office  
Earl Bennett Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
1035 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue West  
Kalispell, MT 59901



Dear B.J.,

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide input during this 5-year review period for the Flathead County Growth Policy. I have summarized comments from local Wildlife Biologist John Vore, local Fisheries Biologist Mark Deleray, Land Use Planning Specialist Doris Fischer, Habitat Conservation Biologist Gael Bissell, Regional Wildlife Manager Jim Williams, Regional Parks Manager Dave Landstrom, and Regional Fisheries Manager Jim Vashro.

First, we agree that the Flathead County Growth Policy's overall goals do recognize the importance of fish and wildlife resources and associated recreational values to the local economy and quality of life in Flathead County. The public surveys and meetings that were undertaken in 2006 clearly showed that local residents wanted to keep as much of this incredible landscape as intact as possible, while still allowing for development of private lands. They also indicated that they would like to keep rural lands rural and working landscapes working so they can continue to enjoy clean water, healthy fish and wildlife habitats, and outdoor recreational opportunities. The abundance of natural resources is one of the reasons that people live here in Flathead County and the county's Growth Policy clearly reflects this important fact.

Given our collective experience with the current Growth Policy over the last 5 years, we have outlined several suggestions for the county to consider that would enhance the county's Growth Policy, making it a clearer, more useful guide for future land use and community development decisions.

1. Include additional descriptive information about the county's fish and wildlife resources. For example, the Growth Policy could include more detailed descriptions of habitats and population conditions of the most important species in the county, such as those at risk and those that drive the local economy. It could include a summary of trends in habitat conditions, rates or amounts of habitat losses over time, and other limiting factors that all affect the biology of these species and their ability to exist in the county. The Growth Policy's fish and wildlife descriptions could also key in to how decisions about growth

and development can impact not only important fish and wildlife species/habitats, but also the management decisions of adjoining private and public landowners and fish and wildlife agencies.

2. Include a specific policy recommending that the county develop basic wildlife distribution/habitat maps or recognize reliable data sources that show fish and wildlife distribution and other relevant information designed to help planners and developers during the subdivision application and review processes. We are willing to work with Flathead County Planning staff, specialists from other agencies, and the public to pull together basic wildlife and recreation information based on specific needs that are important to the public, private landowners, and future decision-makers.
3. Consider adding a recommendation that future updates of local subdivision regulations provide more specific guidance on how staff and others will review subdivision applications for their effects on wildlife and wildlife habitat. Perhaps the county could also add a policy recommending that subdivision applicants incorporate the best available fish and wildlife information into their development proposals and environmental assessments.
4. Recognize that in some development proposals or neighborhood planning situations, growth policy goals will appear to conflict with one another. Offer guidance on how to carefully evaluate and reconcile the conflicts in growth policy goals in order to avoid decisions that support one set of goals at the expense of another. This balancing act could be encouraged through avoiding impacts where possible and incorporating impact mitigation measures that effectively offset or reduce wildlife and habitat impacts.
5. The existing plan provides sound goals for developing alternative travel options for bicycle and pedestrian travel. The plan can now incorporate language urging Flathead County to fully implement the recently approved county trails plan.

If embraced, this handful of suggestions would go a long way toward clarifying how to evaluate and weigh the impacts of growth on these important natural resources, as well as how to avoid or reduce the negative impacts of development on fish and wildlife and their habitats. We welcome workshops or further discussions on these and any other related issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "James R. Satterfield Jr." in a cursive script.

James R. Satterfield Jr., Ph.D.  
Regional Supervisor